

OUT OF THE CITY

After this kind of skating, rinks are a bore

BY LOIS SCOTT
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AFTER SKATING on the Rideau Canal, where can you go?

There isn't much choice: It's back to skating around and around on rinks, trying to make the best of it until you can get back to Ottawa.

In two days, I skated almost 60 kilometres and my daughter a little less. The skateway is 7.8 kilometres from the National Arts Centre to Carleton University or Dow Lake — the cleared ice splits into three — one branch going as far as Carleton, the other around the other side of the lake.

Neither day was cold. One afternoon was cloudy; on the other there was bright sunshine and a strong headwind — hard work going up parts of the canal but all made up for when I came flying down from Carleton, the wind directly behind me. The one evening we skated was a soft winter night with light snow that changed, by midnight, to big soft flakes.

There were few people left by that time, but it had been crowded in the afternoon when I arrived at the change room. (There are a number of these heated cabins along the canal where you can leave your boots from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m. If you haven't claimed them by that time, the attendant leaves them outside the door.) It was jammed with people who had obviously come from work, men in suits and ties and women — it's harder to tell with women, but a lot of them looked as though they might work in offices. Something about their hairdos and makeup.

One man who stopped briefly at a bench I was sitting on said he comes for his lunch hour every day if the weather is okay. "It's so hot and dry in there that you're almost falling asleep by noon," he said.

A little later in the afternoon there were a lot of mothers with small children, who were either



Photo by Miller Services

struggling along on skates or sitting impassively in their sleds, bundled up into little balls, round faces sphinx-like and placid, taking as their due this splendid outing with mother pulling the sled. There were school buses parked along the canal and near each, children who had come from other areas were scuffling and jostling.

Part way down the canal there is an ice palace. A fountain has created a tall, craggy spire that sparkles in the sun and blocks of ice have been used to make tall gates guarded by sculptured ice animals. Other ice blocks are arranged in path-

ways. Some of them are colored and the whole structure is illuminated at night with colored lights. This is the work of the Canadian Art Lab Inc., a group of young artists helping each other, that has a small hut across from the sculpture where jazz, poetry readings, theatre and other works are presented each night. Admission is by membership only, which can be had for a one dollar donation.

Don't go for your skate on weekends unless you like skating in thick crowds. You can pack a lot into two week days. My daughter went to an afternoon session of Parliament and we saw a performance at the Na-

tional Arts Centre and spent a little time at the National Gallery. I squeezed in an extra skate in the morning, we left, skating part way down the canal toward the bus station, carrying my suitcase. On the way I met a few people on their way to work, carrying lunch bags, a man on a bicycle and two joggers.

Going to Ottawa, we splurged on a bedroom on the overnight train which leaves Toronto at 11:30 p.m. and arrives in Ottawa at 6:00 a.m., but you can stay in the train until 8. We came back by bus, non-stop from Ottawa to Toronto, in about four and a half hours.